

The Cabin by MostPalone

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Summary: It was the third day of Christmas break, but he still couldn't stop thinking about her. He knew it was (probably) unhealthy, but he didn't care. He simply had to see her. He formulates a plan, then takes action. (Was initially rated M, moved down to T. Any particularly offensive chapters will get their own 'story'.)

1. The Great Escape

Mike sighed.

It was the third day of Christmas break, but he still couldn't stop thinking about her. He knew it was (probably) unhealthy, but he didn't care. Here he was, laying atop his bed, staring at his pillow, perhaps hoping that somehow it'd turn into Eleven. He wasn't sure, really. He just wanted to see her. Was that too much to ask? It'd been only eight days since their lips had met on the makeshift dance-floor of the middle school gym, but yet Mike was unable to scratch the itch he oh-so constantly had.

He had seen her literally *yesterday*, yet somehow he felt like whenever she wasn't with him, a part of him was missing. He took a moment to consider how cringeworthy a thought like that was before promptly sitting up, kicking his legs over the side of his disheveled duvet. He glanced over at his alarm clock, the red numbers blaring '13:49', as if they were trying to insult Mike's loneliness. He huffed quietly, pressing his feet down on the floor, pushing himself upwards. His thoughts wandered for a few seconds as he bent down, lazily changing into something somewhat more presentable to El. He'd never tell anyone that he actually tried to look good for her, obviously. That'd be social suicide. He took a moment to consider that trying to look good for a girl had its downsides, though. He'd already worn all of his best (or at least, what he considered his best) clothes, which left him with only a boring, plain grey sweater and some jeans. 'I bet she'll be *real* impressed.', he considered for a few moments in a fleeting thought, chuckling quietly to himself shortly thereafter.

He knew he wasn't *really* supposed to go, obviously. Hopper didn't appreciate 'funny business' between the duo, which included seeing each other alone for - as he had so aptly put it - in his mean, 'police-chief voice' "extended periods". Mike adored how little El understood that comment. Just the thought of her eyes glazing over somewhat when Hopper came to that part of the rules between the two of them made him laugh quietly. As far as he knew, she understood that she liked kissing, and that was essentially where her thoughts on the

matter halted. He had figured - no, he had *hoped* that Hopper would have, at some point during their year together, had 'the talk' with her. Or, at least part of it. But no, Mike had come to realise fairly quickly that that was wishful thinking at best. He figured he'd have to do it himself at some point. He just didn't know when, or how.

Nevertheless, El, of course, wouldn't expect him over. In fact, he'd briefly considered the fact that she might have already had an idea not so dissimilar to his. She had already explained previously where she had acquired the ever-so-famous 'punk' look (which Mike wasn't entirely sure he wanted to say he found quite attractive), having run away from home. She hadn't entirely divulged the rest for whatever reason, however Mike found it mostly irrelevant.

It was something about the eyeshadow, he thought. Or maybe it was the hair - or her lips. He had no idea, really, eventually settling on the idea that he found her attractive no matter what she had decided to do with herself. His thoughts were getting sidetracked again.

He shrugged to himself - a thing which he often did - and stepped outside of his bedroom. Following a brief glance in the mirror (and a coy smile), he slowly walked downstairs, glancing around nonchalantly until arriving at the front door. He looked around once more for a few seconds, seemingly unable to find any sign of life. Not a particularly rare occurrence in the Wheeler house.

"MOM!", he yelled. Despite his voice going slightly hoarse, he felt satisfied that he got his point across to whoever was listening. Just as he finished his perhaps slightly over-the-top yell, two figures walked towards him from his rear and his front.

Shit.

He was flanked. The figure immediately to his twelve o'clock was none other than his father, hobbling over slowly, adjusting his glasses. To his six - as he soon found out - was Nancy. A blank, if not slightly annoyed expression strewn across her face.

"What the hell, Mike? We don't live in a fu - a mansion."

"Languaaage." Ted blurted from the corner, having pre-occupied

himself with the toaster before deciding to figure out what Mike wanted.

Nancy simply opted to sigh, grumbling as she not-so-discreetly stomped upstairs with a huff. Mike had no idea what he'd done to annoy her in such a fashion, but he knew she certainly wouldn't be in the mood to answer. Then again, it wasn't like he'd care even if she tried to explain.

Mike flipped around, staring at his father fiddling with the toaster controls, having become blissfully oblivious to the interaction between Mike and his sister. He continued staring at his father fiddling with the controls for a few seconds, amazed at how a man could remain so unaware of his surroundings yet so concentrated on such a boring, menial act.

Mike's father turned to his right slowly, staring at him, his expression entirely neutral. If Mike was honest, he'd have been surprised if his father had heard the yell in the first place - it was more than likely that he'd just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, seeing as Mike's mother had seemingly vanished, he decided to pounce on an opportunity to ask one of his parents if he was allowed out.

"Dad."

"Yes, Michael?"

"So, uh, I was thinkin' of heading over to Dustin's place to - uhm, like, play video games or watch TV or something.."

He could feel his face getting hot. He wasn't particularly fond of lying, even to his parents. Even thinking about lying made him think about Eleven. "Friends don't lie", he thought. Why was it that literally everything in his life could be somewhat associated with the girl he so desires? He pondered this for a moment, despite being mid-sentence, opting to finish with "..y'know? Just thought it'd be cool for the both of us to hang out or something."

"Well, Michael, seeing as your mother is out.."

Ted sighed quietly.

"..I suppose it wouldn't be a problem."

Mike almost jumped in excitement. He nodded quickly, turning to face the door. His right leg sprung forward, only for his father to blurt out hastily.

"Back by eleven at the *latest*, you know the rules."

"Yeah, yeah, I know, I know."

And that was it, out he ran. Ted wondered for a few seconds as to why Mike was so excited to see Dustin of all people, but he quickly shook it off, hobbling back over to the toaster. He grumbled as he noticed that Mike had failed to shut the door as he'd left, but decided that the toaster was a more pressing matter.

2. Attire

Mike hastily ran around to the left side of the house, grabbing his bike from the garage. He flung himself over the seat, gripping the handlebars, cycling off in an instant. He heard his father yelling something from inside the house, something to do with closing the door. He didn't care, there were much, much more pressing matters on his mind.

As he cycled down the road, past Lucas' house, he closed his eyes for a few brief seconds, running through the path to the cabin in his head. He'd only been to visit her in the cabin once in the past eight days, and that was with everybody else. It just wasn't the same. He wanted time alone with her, to talk. Just to exist, to be in her presence. The two of them, together. It sounded perfect.

He flew past Dustin's house at record speed, counting the number of turns on either side of him before he'd have to go into the woods, 'off the beaten track' as it were.

Finally, he came to what he'd been told the start of the path was. There was no real path, for obvious reasons, just a few trees lined up in a certain way which indicated to him where he was. He'd had to extort the route from Nancy, as - like Hopper had said - he found it somewhat *undesirable* for Mike and El to be together alone.

He hopped off of his bike, pushing it gently down the steep gradient into the woods. He bit his lip, yet the cold winter air bit harder. It wasn't freezing, but certainly cold enough to be of an inconvenience. Snow dusted the ground like sugar on a cake, the entire woods enveloped in a whitish hue.

Why didn't I take a jacket?

He was cold, needless to say. The thought of Eleven, however, drove him forwards, just like it always had and always would. As he drew slowly closer to the cabin, having walked for twenty minutes or so, he could see the snow in the distance being discoloured by a faint - flickering - yellow hue.

Bingo.

The lights inside the cabin were reflecting ever-so-gently off of the snow surrounding it, despite the fact that El was supposed to leave the curtains closed. He walked towards the light, taking a second to realise how oddly like Poltergeist that sounded.

He clambered up the stairs rather un-discreetly, wincing as they rattled and clunked under his weight. He stood at the door, raising his fist in preparation for the 'secret knock'. Before he could even begin, however, he heard a rapid shuffling of feet. He swore he saw something looking out of the window to his right, in the corner of his eye.

The door swung open, and there she was.

Holy shit.

She stared at Mike, and Mike stared straight back. It was funny, really. Despite having seen each other three or four times in the past week or so, they still couldn't get over one another. He moved his eyes from hers, looking down at her attire. Normally, she'd either be in pyjamas or (as of more recently) one of his jumpers. This time, though, she was wearing a large jacket, and some boots.

He opened his mouth to talk, but was quickly muted as she lunged forwards, wrapping her arms around his waist, perching her chin on his shoulder. He wrapped his own arms around her waist in turn, holding her as tight as he could muster.

He laughed quietly, slowly backing off, arms still around her waist. She leant back, booping their foreheads together. He gazed into her eyes, the smile across his face uncontrollably large. His face was flush with colour, but he didn't care. He knew that she wouldn't care, either. She slowly pushed her head upwards, pressing her lips gently against his. He agreed happily, both giving and receiving a small peck.

Funny business, he thought. His internal monologue chuckled as he pushed his head backwards, staring at her, their foreheads still pressed together.

"Hey."

She giggled quietly, unsure of quite how to express her emotions around Mike. 'What do I say?' she thought, once again only able to out a mere giggle. He smiled in return, to which she could only smile straight back.

"C'mon, let's head inside."

He twisted around slightly, one arm still around her waist, leading her into the cabin. As he reached back to get the door, it suddenly swung towards him, closing with somewhat more than a bang. Just as quickly, all the locks flicked across and upwards. He turned back around, looking down at El. She stared down at the ground, a wide grin still stuck across her face.

Duh, he thought, his internal monologue once again springing forth, almost berating him for forgetting about her abilities.

He released his arm from its grip around her waist, wandering over to the couch.

"Mike."

He spun around, staring at her. She nonchalantly waltzed into her room, sitting down on the bed. His mind melted.

If Hopper were to come in right now, I would be dead. No, actually, I'd be more than dead. Is that possible? I'm sure Hopper'd make it possible.

"Oh - okay." he nodded hastily, slowly walking over. He wandered into her room, sitting down next to her. He smiled, fidgeting with his hands in his lap, peering over in El's direction. She still had her jacket on.

"What's with the, uhm, attire?"

"Attire?". She squinted, staring at Mike.

"Oh. It's like, uh, your clothes and stuff."

She nodded once, her grin widening slightly. She nodded again, this

time more directly towards Mike.

"Wanted to see you."

He remained silent, reaching over one of his hands. He wrapped it in hers, maintaining eye contact. He tried to make himself seem more stern, but failed miserably. *Her eyes*, he thought. He couldn't pretend to berate her for what she tried to do - after all, he was the one that had actually gone and done it.

"El, you - you shouldn't.. You shouldn't try come see me."

She frowned, her eyes slumping over slightly. She continued staring at Mike, opening her mouth a touch.

"Why?"

"Because, y'know, it's dangerous. I'm s'posed to come - well." he cut himself off, having realised his mistake.

"Because - because, I dunno. I just don't want you getting hurt."

"Mike."

He knew that look. She knew just as well as he did that he was lying. Well, partially anyway.

"Well, *you know*, I'm not really supposed to be here. Not alone, anyway."

She leaned in slightly closer, seemingly confused.

"Why?"

Why? Why do you always have to make things so difficult?

He couldn't stand being angry at her internally. He knew that she didn't understand and that it wasn't her fault. He knew he shouldn't get annoyed.

It isn't her fault, Wheeler. Come on.

He squirmed slightly, his own hand fidgeting with hers softly as he

spoke.

"Well, uhm, funny -"

She'll ask. You know she will.

His mind was talking to him.

Screw it.

He paused, gathering his thoughts.

"Funny business. Like what Hop said."

She could tell he was feeling awkward. From the squirming to the red face, she knew Michael Wheeler better than his parents. She leaned back slightly, giving him some more space, easing her shoulders somewhat. She looked over at him, almost proud of herself for recognising the fact that he felt awkward.

"Mike."

He glanced over at her, mumbling something quietly before turning to face her entirely.

"Yeah?"

"Okay?"

What does that mean? Am I okay? No, El, I'm not. Of course I'm not. I don't want to explain to you what funny business is. Really, genuinely. If you can read minds, please, please stop asking questions.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay."

She reached out and poked his face with her index finger, giggling quietly.

"Red."

Jesus Christ.

3. I'm not really so good at this I mean

Mike chuckled quietly at El's comment, taking in a deep breath.

She knew how awkward he felt, somehow. She looked over at him, lowering her free hand back down to her lap, a faint smile across her lips. Mike looked up from his lap, gazing over in her direction in return, a grin just slightly popping up.

Shit. Did I make it awkward?

"El, look, uhm.."

He took a breath, sighing quietly. She cocked her head slightly, staring at him.

"Has, uh, has Hop spoken to you about, like..."

He trailed off again.

You're pathetic. Seriously.

El propped a balled fist under her chin, resting her elbow on the bed. She bent over slightly, staring up at Mike's slowly reddening face. As much as she disliked the idea of making him uncomfortable, she had to admit that she found whatever he was doing rather entertaining.

He released his hand from hers, placing both of his own in his lap, adjusting his position on the bed. He shifted slightly, his legs dangling over the side. He peered down at her, sighing again.

She rolled her eyes, a 'trick' that she had picked up from Mike, much to Hopper's distaste. Mike furrowed his brows, continuing to remain silent, focusing on her.

She propped open her mouth, speaking simply,

"Awkward."

Followed by a stifled giggle.

"Yeah."

Mike smiled in her direction, surprised at her ability to detect the awkwardness lingering in the air. As much as he wanted to pipe up, he just, he wasn't strong enough. So he thought, anyway.

What would she say? Does she know? Do I want to know if she knows? I don't know.

Mike's internal monologue once again offered literally nothing useful.

"Hey, it's uh, it's almost twenty past - I mean, uhm, two two zero."

Nice one. Real smooth.

She simply stared at him, remaining silent. For a moment she glanced up at the clock on her wall, observing the analogue time, connecting the dots in her mind.

"So, y'know, like, lunch - right?"

Once again Wheeler, you're the smoothest fucker around.

As usual, she simply nodded and spoke directly;

"Yes."

That wasn't a very useful answer.

"I mean, like, have you had lunch? Because I haven't yet, and, well, uhm, I could make you something. If - if you're hungry, or whatever."

The smooth train has left the station.

"Haven't had lunch. I'm hungry."

Well, there we go.

"Alright, sure. I guess asking if Eggo's are good is pointless, right?"

Sarcasm. That was a tricky one. Mike had tried teaching her the concept the other day whilst the others had watched TV. He had decided at the time to grow increasingly sarcastic as he spoke to her,

much to El's evident frustration. It got to a point where he essentially gave up and decided that what she knew was good enough. As good of a job as Hopper had done improving her vocabulary, he hadn't quite taught her how various other parts of the language worked, despite using them constantly around everybody else. Maybe he'd just assumed she'd learn naturally.

El laughed quietly, nodding up towards Mike.

Huh. I guess she understood.

Mike stood up, throwing his right leg forwards towards the door.

"Mike."

He swivelled around almost instantaneously, looking down at El.

"What is..". She paused.

Please, please, no, no, no, no.

El nodded to herself, smiling as she finished her sentence.

"..love?"

Abort, abort, abort, no - no, I'm not about to - no, absolutely not.

The question - if he was honest - hit him like a tonne of bricks. He knew it - or something similar - was coming, but it still had a rough impact. How was he supposed to explain love to her? Yikes.

"Well, El, uhm.. when two people love each other, uh, they, like, they uh.."

Keep it together.

On second thoughts, no, we're doomed. She'll just ask more questions.

He could feel his face getting hotter by the second. He was dreading this conversation. Not only because it was awkward, no, no - what if she - not that he'd ever admit that he cared to anyone other than himself, but what if she didn't love him? He'd explain the concept

and... then what?

She raised her eyebrows, staring at him, as if to say 'Go on then.'

"Well, like, when two people who like each other, they like, they feel all fuzzy and stuff around one another, a-and being around one another makes them feel, like, uh, really happy. And stuff. Y'know? I'm not really so good at this I mean you should really ask Hop..."

Nice.

"Oh, okay."

His heart was crushed. He expected something more than *that*. He wasn't expecting a wedding there-and-then but shit, just about anything more than 'Oh, okay.' would have sufficed.

He piped up, trying to hide the sadness in his voice.

"Is, uhm, is that all you wanna know?"

"Yes. Love you."

She looked up at him with such an innocent smile. How could she say it so nonchalantly? It was like, a big thing. A really big thing. People don't just say that like that. Do they? The thoughts rushing through his head barely had time to fester as he choked on his own saliva, trying to conceptualise a word or two.

"You, you too, uh, I'll just - I'll get some foOd.."

Nice voice, shithead.

Undeterred by the voice crack, he continued.

"..out and ready."

She sat up, nodding with a firm smile.

As he walked out, he felt a strange 'glow' in his mind. Everything was fine. Really, everything was completely okay. The three essays he had to write in two weeks drifted off into the depths of his mind, joining

the 'seemingly irrelevant' group of thoughts. An odd sort of happiness was what he felt. He'd never felt it before. It wasn't quite - or even close to, for that matter - *ecstasy*. It was just, just happy. He pondered on this new feeling for a few seconds, standing in the middle of the cabin's living area, tapping his right foot incessantly on the hard wood floor.

El strolled out of her room, now lacking a large jacket and boots, instead covered with a grey jumper not so dissimilar to Mike's, complimented oddly by a pair of pyjama bottoms with small roses imprinted on them, top to bottom. She paused, staring at him as he stood in the middle of her living area. He was blinking and biting his lip, so he must have been alive. 'If he's biting his lip..' she thought, - '..he must be thinking. He always thinks like that.'

She was right.

4. Is that even a real phrase?

El opened her mouth to speak, however opted to remain quiet. She simply stared at Mike, who, with his back turned, looked rather odd. His head was slightly tilted down, his foot tapping continuously against the floor.

There is no way she understands the weight of what she said. Does she?

He thought back a few days, prior to the gang going over to the cabin.

"Ooooh, El, I looove you! Kiss me!"

"Shut up, Lucas."

"Marry me El, please, I love you!"

"Seriously?"

"El, let's have se-"

Lucas' next insult was cut off rather abruptly, unsurprisingly. Mike found that rather often, a swift Bruce Lee-esque punch to the arm or the face was (usually) enough to shut someone up. Not that he'd ever try and do any real damage, that is. Just enough to give himself and the others peace for a few seconds before the insults inevitably restarted.

It got under his skin, he wasn't going to lie to himself. All the insults, as childish as they were, had some merit. The amount of times he was 'permitted' to see El between her arrival back and the Snow Ball were less than stellar, to say the least. He would always accidentally let slip his excitement for the next time he'd see her, and Lucas, as usual, would always poke fun.

He didn't really understand why the insults worked, though. It's not like he wasn't confident in regards to he and El's relationship. They had, quite probably, the strongest relationship in Hawkins. Well, that's what anyone who isn't Mike Wheeler would tell you. He was just confused as to how he managed to 'score' - as juvenile of a word

as it was - someone like *her*.

Mike flew back to the present tense, having heard a quiet shuffling of feet behind him, not to mention the muffled giggling which El found so apt to do constantly. He wasn't complaining - it was adorable.

Aren't I confident? Why would I be not-confident? Is that even a real phrase?

As usual, Mike's inner thoughts trailed off, taking most of his insecurities with them.

He spun around, staring at El, noticing her new lack of outdoor clothing. Once again, he couldn't complain. She stared up at him, doe-eyed. She seemed a bit 'out of it', snapping back into reality in the few seconds following Mike's soft-spoken;

"El."

She jumped, her neutral expression adjusting quickly into a smile.

"You okay? What were you doing?"

"Fine. Watching you."

Mike squinted, a look of confusion washing over his face.

"Watching me? What for? Did I do something?"

El pointed at the spot he was standing in, shrugging.

"You were, um, uh.."

She mumbled for a few seconds before her eyes lit up. He could have sworn he saw the lightbulb above her head flicker. With a perhaps slightly overly-giddy smile, she proclaimed;

"Lost in thought!"

Huh. That's new.

He smiled warmly, chuckling.

"Yeah. I was, kinda. Look, El, I - lemme sit on the couch."

Here we go again. At least try to make it seem like you aren't fucking retarded this time.

He walked over to the couch placed in the middle of the room, facing the television set. He plonked himself down, leaning back slightly, preparing himself internally for the speech that was about to ever-so-swiftly glide out of his lips. Or, so he hoped, anyway. He patted the cushion to his right, smiling softly again as El wandered over before also plonking herself down. She placed both of her hands in her lap, looking over in his direction as she shimmied over slightly, their legs brushing against one another gently.

"Well, uh.."

He paused, thinking for a moment.

"Look, El, I'm just gonna -"

He huffed, taking a few seconds.

She cocked her head. It was one of *those* conversations. One of those conversations in which he just sort of.. mumbled nervously. He was always so hesitant when it came to talking about their relationship. She didn't mind, though, not at all. She'd always listen carefully, nodding along in agreement. Besides, sometimes - even she could admit to herself - she'd need certain concepts explained to an extent further than had been previously provided. Mike was great at that. Despite this, it became glaringly obvious to her that the idea of having lunch had been and gone as quickly as Mike's use of it as an excuse originally.

"Telling someone you love them is a big deal, right?"

He looked at El expectantly, raising his eyebrows. Without hesitation, she nodded quickly.

"Mike. I understand."

Huh.

She continued quietly.

"You make me warm and fuzzy."

El paused, taking a moment to consider her thoughts. Mike could always tell when she was thinking. She had a look, a certain glint in her eyes, a certain *panache* about her when she was lost in the depths of her mind, however brief the pause. She was better than Mike at speaking, easily, regardless of the fact that her vocabulary was far less expansive than his. She always considered her sentences with a great deal more caution, whereas Mike, on the other hand, tended to throw out anything and everything that came into his mind as he spoke.

She pointed at him with her index, speaking up once again.

"Pretty."

She paused, giving Mike's self confidence a few seconds to tick over into the positive.

"I'm safe around you."

She looked at Mike a final time, nodding with a smile, clearly satisfied with her brief yet all-bases-covered explanation. She then shifted, staring into her lap, fidgeting with her hands. Despite some of her shortcomings, she knew exactly what awkwardness felt like.

Mike remained silent, unsure of exactly what to do. He was happy - of course - over the moon, but he didn't really know what to say. Usually, as aforementioned, he found it easy to spew out a random jumble of words, but this time, no, no. It had to wait. All he could do was anxiously rub his knees, pretending to act like what she had just said wasn't as earth-shatteringly large of a big deal as it actually was.

"Um, cool."

Are you fucking serious? Did you - did you really just say that? We're doomed. Jump ship, Wheeler. Honestly, you could give a fucking chimp the same job and get better results.

He stuttered quickly, following the horrific comment prior.

"B-because I feel the same around you, El. You're puh-"

Don't be a pussy.

He cleared his throat indiscreetly.

"Pretty. And you make me feel safe too, um, obviously."

Bet a chimp couldn't carry that train-wreck to victory.

El looked up at Mike, a smile still donned over her face. She continued rubbing her hands together in her lap, remaining silent. They both stared at one another, waiting for someone to do something.

She slowly leaned her top half over, haphazardly gazing into his eyes, pushing her face towards his as their foreheads softly booped into each other. Mike found it fit to remain silent as she lifted her arms from her lap, wrapping them slowly around his waist.

Just as swiftly, Mike lifted his own up, tucking a loose curl of her hair behind one of her ears casually before opting to rest them around the back of her neck.

'Shitshitshitshitshitshit', 'She's never done that before' and 'Don't be a pussy!' immediately sprung to mind.

He leaned into the exchange as gracefully as a giraffe wearing stilts walks.

Great.

El, on the other hand, seemed to have things ever so slightly under control. She pushed her head up, gently pressing her lips to his, the giddy smile on her face not daring to fade. She noticed fairly quickly, however, that this kiss was different. Very, very different. They had never kissed for longer than three seconds before, yet - hang on - what is that?

This is right, right? You're totally supposed to use your tongue.

'What is he doing?' Her body jolted slightly at the new sensation,

partially because she enjoyed it and partially because she had no idea what he was doing.

Following the rather alarming jolt, Mike pulled away, staring at her, his hands having now shifted to her shoulders, hers still firmly affixed around his waist. He bit his bottom lip, a look of confusion followed by a comical smile washing over his face.

"That was.." he paused, giving El space to speak. He hoped - no, he prayed that she wouldn't be freaked out.

This is it, she's gonna freak and I'm gonna have to turn gay, or something. I don't even like dudes, but shit, I've probably got better chances with them than her-

"New."

She paused again, her smile widening. He had hope.

"Fun, too. Fuzzy."

5. This isn't fair

Seemingly unable to brush the grin from his face, Mike merely stared at her.

Three-hundred and fifty three days. It was worth it. It was so, so worth it. He couldn't find the ability to think straight, much less talk, yet his expression said all that needed to be said. He looked to be stuck somewhere between horrific embarrassment and total elation. El would normally have found this hilarious - had she not also fallen into exactly the same trance.

Arms around one another, all they did was remain silent. This wasn't awkward, no. This was something else. Love, perhaps.

Their staring session was short-lived, however, as garbled static followed by beeping filled the room from a box in the far right corner. El immediately blinked, shaking her head as she gazed over at the box, narrowing her eyes. As the beeps continued, she nodded slowly in sequence, mumbling quietly.

"B, A, C, K, S, O, O, N. 3, 1, 5. O, F, F, E, A, R, L, Y."

El blinked once again, turning her head back towards Mike. She stifled a giggle at the ever-so-prominent grin still plastered across his face. He looked ridiculous.

"Mike."

"Mike."

Oh, oh - shit.

He shook his head, his eyes flickering numerous times as he snapped out of whatever it was he found himself stuck in. He mumbled quietly, evidently confused.

"Uh, oh - um, yeah?"

"He'll be home soon."

What? Oh, fuck, shit, Jesus-

She tilted her head forwards slightly, widening her eyes a touch.

"Stay."

Was that a question or a command?

He frowned, clearly flustered. His day had gone from brilliant to catastrophic in mere seconds. Not even two minutes ago was he 'making out' with his girlfriend, only now to have his life (literally) in imminent danger.

"El, you kn-"

"Mike."

She lowered a hand, tugging at the sleeve of his jumper with a frown.

"Stay."

This isn't fair.

A/N: Apologies for the short chapter, needed something to tide everyone over until I can get around to finishing off the next. Maths tutors, school work, yada yada. All the support is immensely appreciated! Thank you all so much.

6. Stay

A/N: Apologies to everyone for the delay. I've been (and still am, really) busy with a load of preliminary exams. They're over next week, though, so writing should pick up more then. This chapter is pretty 'juicy', so enjoy!

He couldn't say no. It'd break her heart.

"He's nice."

Hopper? Nice?

Mike remained silent, looking drained and defeated. He was terrified. Who wouldn't be? He knew his death was only a few minutes away. Tuning everything else out, his thoughts wandered.

If I get to be a ghost - which'd be totally cool - who should I scare?

Oh, Lucas. Definitely Lucas. He's such an asshole, I'll scare the shit out of him when he goes to the bathroom or something.

Satisfied with his brief acceptance of death, he focused on El, who was sitting in front of him, her arms still around his waist. They usually didn't stay this close for this long, but who was he to argue? Besides, knowing that death was approaching and by all means inevitable, he might as well spend his last moments with her.

"Mike."

She paused, a frown forming.

"You don't have to stay."

Leave. Wait, no, stay. Or - well. Fuck it, stay.

Mike shook his head, a smile gleaming over his face slowly.

"I'll stay, El."

The excitement in her eyes was palpable. She slowly leaned forward, her eyes affixed on Mike's, opening her mouth a touch...

Clank, bang, knock.

Fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck

Mike jumped backwards, remaining loosely in El's grip. His eyes widened significantly as he stared at the door (and his incoming demise).

El joined him, turning around and staring wide-eyed at the door. They looked like two deer in headlights.

She turned around for a moment, whispering quietly into the crook of Mike's neck.

"He won't hurt you."

She leaned up in an instant, giving him a surprisingly over-confident, unexpected peck on the lips before turning around to stare at the door once again, awaiting a knock of some form.

Knockknock.

Knock.

Knockknockknock.

The locks flicked down and across slowly as the door pushed inwards with a distinct creak. A black figure shrouded in the afternoon December darkness waded himself into the cabin, staring down at the ground as he wandered in, expecting nothing out of the ordinary. He raised his right arm to hang up his hat, glancing towards the couch nonchalantly as he did.

His arm froze, as did his body.

The trio remained in complete silence, only interrupted by a bird tweeting for a second or two.

Mike stared at the Chief, his mouth agape and his eyes somehow

wider than they were before the door opened. He was literally staring at death. This was his Grim Reaper.

The Chief opened his mouth to talk, yet remained silent, somehow still frozen in time. Mike looked between the diminutive girl to his side and the large, grizzly-bear like human to his front, considering for a moment how much damage the former could do to the latter. He gazed down at the arms wrapped around his waist, noticing their grip tightening softly. His arms were still securely fastened to her shoulders.

Suddenly, a gruff yet quiet noise came from the hat-stand.

"What.."

The quiet nature was short lived. A boom followed, the roughness in his voice persisting.

"Is *he* doing here?"

El looked - for lack of a better word - pissed. She immediately piped up, causing Mike to wince at the grip of her arms and hands around his waist. He was being squeezed like a tube of toothpaste.

"He is MY girl-"

She paused mid-shout, leaving Mike to quickly whisper through his teeth, his lips remaining still.

"Boy."

"Boyfriend! And I LOVE him!"

She hastily ran through the multitude of things she knew couples did together, in spite of her lack of knowledge in regards to relationships. She'd heard them from Mike, the television, his friends (mostly Dustin) and even Hopper himself.

"We KISS! We make out! We have sex!"

Silence.

Mike could have died on the spot. Only two out of those three statements were true, but how the hell was the Chief supposed to know? How the hell did *she* know how to say *that* word in the 'right' context anyway!? She didn't know anything about stuff like that!

"Thatlastoneisn'ttrue." Mike squeaked, very clearly not loud enough for the Chief to be able to hear. Not that he'd want to hear whatever excuse that Wheeler kid made anyway.

The Chief remained silent. He turned around, dropping his hat, taking a step outside. He stood for a moment before reaching backwards, slamming the door with such force the cabin shook, piles of dust erupting from mounds in the ceiling.

"El!" Mike hissed under his breath, staring at her, clearly furious.

"What the fuck was that!? We don't have sex! Are you *trying* to get me killed!?"

She stared at him, still wide eyed. She had never, *never* seen him like this before. She tried to speak but her breath hitched, tears forming in her eyes, she could feel her face heat up as her bottom lip quivered. All she had wanted to do was explain what was going on! But Hop was so angry, she just couldn't control herself. She didn't know what to say.

Mike remained silent. He knew he wasn't supposed to get that angry at her, but he also knew that the Chief was now indescribably angry at him. It could take months - no, - years for them to even speak to one another again. Not to mention El, she and Mike's relationship could be best described as finished. From the Chief's point of view, anyway.

He mumbled under his breath, shaking his head. It wasn't her fault. Well - it was a little bit. But Mike could deal with it.

He wrapped a hand around the back of her head, pulling her towards his shoulder. She sniffled, tears slowly dribbling down her cheeks. He reached down his other hand, gently rubbing the rough fabric across her back.

He mumbled again, this time slightly more audibly.

"I'm sorry, El."

He never swore. Not out loud, anyway, and *especially* not at El.

She sniffled again, the wet patch on Mike's sweater growing increasingly large with every passing second. He felt awful, and rightfully so.

"It's okay, it's fine. You're okay." He whispered in a gentle tone, rubbing circles on her back. He'd never done this before, either. It seemed to be working, anyway.

He turned around for a moment, staring at the door, the large shadow imprinted on the window to its left still not daring to fade away. He'd have to talk to the Chief at some point, that was inevitable. He couldn't help but feel a tinge of guilt as, after all, this was his idea.

He peered down at El. She looked defeated, only adding to the pangs of pain he felt. His hand shifted from her head to her back, interlinking with the other. She stared up at him as he cuddled her, his own look of defeat joining hers. She wanted to speak, she really did, but she just couldn't. Even if she tried, she doubted anything coherent would come out. She could always talk to Mike, though. Coherent or not.

"M-m-my fault." She whispered, sniffing once again. She turned her head to the side, resting against the wet spot she had previously created on his grey sweater.

Mike spoke in a low tone, holding her tight, remaining silent for a few seconds, gathering his thoughts.

"It isn't, El. I promise."

She peered up for a moment, nodding before placing her head back in its previous resting place. Lifting her legs up, she kicked them on to the unoccupied part of the sofa to her right, using Mike as one large pillow.

"L-love me?" She barely managed to sputter out. Her face was ridden with a look of fear. Had she just ruined her favourite thing in the entire world?

"I love you."

He took a long drag, the smoke filling up the bitter December air. It had been, and still was, a dark, cold, ugly, shitty, awful day. He was really, really looking forward to opening up the door to a nice warm cabin, interruption and (mostly) teenager free.

But no.

That fucking Wheeler kid was at it again. He knew about their shenanigans too well. He'd let it slide before, no less. The little evening kisses, their quiet conversations - God knows what they talk about - and their indiscreet hugs which always last a little too long. But this? This was too much.

He didn't need this in his life. Not right now, not ever. All that Wheeler kid had ever done was make a fuss of *his* daughter in *his* cabin. It was too much to process at once. He knew they liked each other - that was a given, obviously - but for her to say they loved each other? She's only fourteen! Does she even know what that means?

And all this time, right under his nose. They'd been doing whatever it was they found so fit to do - which he'd rather not think about - without even having the decency to *try* and tell him! What the fuck was Wheeler thinking? He'd pulled some stunts in his time, but this, oh-hoh-hoh, this was something else.

He almost would have preferred if El had gone over to the Wheeler's. At least then he wouldn't have to deal with it, right?

No, no. It was wrong to think like that. She was his *daughter*, anyway. And she was fourteen, but Christ, they'd done it together? Granted, he was only a year older when he'd - yeah, but really? Where? How? He didn't want to know. He really, really didn't want to know. He wasn't one for juicy details, Joyce was more in that

region. Oh, shit, Joyce!

Now, of course, was as fit a time as any to remember that he'd promised Joyce that he'd pick her up from work, given that her car was in the shop semi-permanently. He glanced down at his wristwatch, cigarette still burning away in his mouth. He muttered under his breath.

"Three twenty five, she finishes at four, that's thirty-five minutes to get into town. Shit."

Mike damn nearly jumped out of his skin when the door flew inwards, the grizzly-bear figure standing there with what Mike could have sworn was a scythe.

The Chief growled angrily,

"I'll be back at five. If either of you so much as lay a finger on each other you're over."

He shot Mike an angry glance, just as Mike tried to-

"We haven't had sex. I don't know why she said that."

The Chief was out the door in seconds, having clearly not heard whatever it was that Mike had tried to say.

Well. It was a start.

7. Teenagers

The trip into Hawkins was a short one, as usual, despite the dark trek back through the woods. Pulling up, Hopper saw Joyce sitting on a bench outside Melvald's General. The engine of his Chevy rumbled and sputtered into silence in an instant. With a clanking of metal and a decidedly loud sigh, the Chief stepped out and down on to the sidewalk, greeting Joyce with a rather awkward hug-turned-handshake.

"Right on time." She smirked, glancing down at her wrist-watch, the cigarette in her mouth absentmindedly burning away. He was ten minutes late.

"Yeah, well." He sounded strange. Not angry, but - hm - gruff. Then again, he always did. He was Hopper.

"If it hadn't been for some teenagers invading my cabin-"

Whoops.

He cut himself off abruptly. Not only did the idea of talking about his daughter with Joyce of all people slightly terrify him, the fact that he'd now undoubtedly cornered himself into a discussion about she and Mike's relationship was the only thing he found scarier and more intimidating than the idea that the duo had a relationship in the first place. Sometimes he found it difficult to even comprehend how the two of them could exist the way they did. They were so inseparable, it was cringeworthy.

"A single teenager, that is." He chuckled offhandedly. There was no way that worked.

"A single teenager? Oh - well, a second ago I coulda' sworn you mentioned another one."

He looked at her quizzically. What were these mind games? He didn't say anything. This subject is strictly one to be avoided.

"Pretty sure ya' did, Hop. Mike, right?"

What? He hadn't said shit. Had he?

Joyce sighed a happy sigh, the smile on her face slightly too giddy to come across as completely real.

"Oh, Hop, the wonders of teenage love." She threw her hands up into the air in a dramatic manner as she spoke, the tone and emotion in her voice decidedly overly-enthusiastic.

"Alright, alright. Gimme' a break."

She chuckled again, inhaling deeply into the loose hanging paper-wrapped mound of tobacco hanging from between her lips, a slightly overly pleased sigh following shortly thereafter. Once again, she'd won the ever so important battle that was psychological warfare, Hopper style.

Hopper sighed, placing a palm atop his balding head. He'd left his hat at the pleasure dome- ahem, cabin. He spoke up, the gruff-ness in his voice pushing forth, kept only at bay by his continually quiet tone of voice. Despite the fact that it was dark out - and December - the teenagers invading his cabin was not something that needed to be public knowledge.

His lips creased slightly as he spoke, his words only slipping out for moments before finding their way into Joyce's ears.

"In the truck. I gotta ask you somethin'." Not a hint of weakness poked through the silver-toned, impenetrable glass that Hopper held over his mind. Despite how easy it was to extract information from him, he did a hell of a job of making it seem like he didn't care. Stern as ever, he turned around and waltzed over to his truck.

Keeping his stern and overconfident facade up - despite his nervousness, - he threw himself into the cabin with slightly too much force. He came close to knocking Joyce over on the opposing side as she clambered in. Persevering, Joyce's small figure struggled for a moment before she hoisted herself into the cabin with a clunk and a clank, followed by heavy breathing. Once again, he spoke in a distinctly low tone.

"El and you-know-who were at the cabin, alright? You win."

Her tone of voice significantly changed as the drained look on her face formed into yet another loose smile;

"Oooh, but what were they doin' Hop? Gimme' the details! C'mon!"

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. Just as Hop was Mike's Grim Reaper, Hop's Grim Reaper was Joyce. Always had been, probably always would be.

"Look, alright, she - El, - she said they'd - you know? They'd done it. Together."

He felt like a teenager again. The word sex wasn't particularly taboo, but it was sure as shit not something he was keen on saying out-loud, especially not around Joyce.

She had that look on her face. He knew she wanted him to elaborate. This was evil, literal evil.

"They had sex, alright? Christ."

"Is that it? They're what, fourteen, fifteen? It's not that weir-"

"It is, okay? It is." He looked bothered, and unreasonably so at that. More so than he usually looked, which was certainly not a good start.

Joyce wrapped her left hand around Hopper's forearm, sighing quietly.

"I'll-"

"No."

Ouch. She squinted for a moment, clearly unrelenting.

"Listen to me, Hop. I'll talk to them. I don't wanna imagine what you put them through." She paused for a moment, opting to remain silent.

She glanced up at Hopper, counting silently the rough, coarse hairs running over his chin and up through his cheeks. He looked defeated.

As sorry as she felt for him, she absolutely adored juicy details and couldn't wait to talk to the famous couple that had caused the conundrum in the first place.

Their arms remained wrapped around each other as Hopper stormed out, the cold winter breeze yelling through the cabin for a few seconds before quickly being silenced as the door found it fit to slam shut once more. Mike looked down at El, wincing in parallel to her as the door found it so apt to close itself in the manner presented.

He leaned back into the sofa, holding El steadily in his embrace. Arms still wrapped around one another, her head still to his shoulder, all he could do was think. There was nothing to be said. Well, there was, of course, but he wasn't planning on talking anytime soon. El sniffled again, wiping her tear-stained face gently, leaving the reddening across it to gradually subside. Mike felt really, really awful. As he should, of course. He leaned down, planting a kiss atop her head, exhaling gently. Nuzzling herself under his chin, she whispered quietly.

"Music."

Mike's frown turned into just a hint of a smirk. The word 'music' for El meant two very particular songs.

El spoke up again, her voice persistent but slightly louder.

"Don't want to move."

Mike tried to shift from under her - as he'd assumed she was giving him 'orders' - but was met with fierce contempt.

"Comfy."

She watched with a smile as Mike rolled his eyes, sighing quietly.

"Why don't we stay like this, then?"

El spoke softly and simply once again, the smile on her face gradually widening.

"Music."

"Let's just - here, gimme' your hand."

Mike moved her hands from around his waist, wrapping them around his neck and shoulders. In yet another swift motion, he also wrapped a single arm under her waist, the other on the opposing side of her legs, under her knees. It was panic inducing in its own sense, regardless of the duo's physical stability. In an instant, he stood up - taking her in his stride. He wasn't gonna lie, this was the most romantic yet most terrifying thing he'd ever done.

In typical Mike Wheeler fashion, the moment he stood up was the moment his body found as good as any to stumble forwards, causing the both of them to shriek in harmony. Bumbling towards the record player in the corner, all El could find fit to do was giggle. How did he do this? Despite all that had just occurred, he could still make her laugh. His powers were never-ending.

Having stumbled over to the table on which the record player sat semi-successfully, Mike tried nudging open a box on the floor with his right foot, yelping as he kicked slightly harder than he had initially intended. The box popped open with minimal resistance, showing little regard for Mike's pain. Three particular records sat at the front.

The first was still reasonably fresh, the artwork gleaming just as it should. El had begged Hop for this, having previously watched Back To The Future with the group. It was, of course, The Power Of Love, by Huey Lewis & The News.

The second, which Mike found rather odd but opted not to judge, was Brothers In Arms by Dire Straits. Again, this was still relatively new looking. He couldn't figure out whether El had taken a particular liking for rock music or if the Chief had also gone and got himself a present whilst buying various other items for El.

And lastly, but arguably most importantly, was El's favourite record of all. It was the one that made the two smile the most, the one that started and reminded them of their fondest memories, their happiest moments, containing their favourite song. It was none other than The Police's Synchronicity. Mike had spent nearly a month's worth of his allowance to be able to purchase it. It was, after all, the perfect gift.

The cover art alone made him slightly more giddy than he'd care to admit.

At once, the sleeve floated upwards and on to the table that the record player lay atop. Mike didn't even have to say a word.

The vinyl itself slipped out of the sleeve quickly, and Mike immediately noticed that the second side was considerably more worn out than the first - and in particular, only a small section of the second side.

Oh, wait. Right.

He glanced down at the track list on the sleeve which had since been turned over by El's various telekinesis shenanigans. He read over it for a brief second, a warm smile flickering its way across his lips as he realised.

Side two,

7. Every Breath You Take

That clears it up.

In an instant, whilst Mike hadn't been looking - the bang of a snare drum echoed from the speakers, followed almost instantaneously by that guitar riff, the one that made El melt. It was adorable.

He stared down at El, only to find she was staring straight back at him.

8. Ignorance is bliss

A/N: Well folks, here we are.

First of all, I want to apologise to anyone who is still keeping up with this story - if anybody actually is. It has been far, far too long since I last updated it (nearly a year) and frankly; an apology is long overdue. I certainly got swamped last year, and I'm not going to pretend as if it's not going to happen again. It may well. However, I understand that just leaving and saying nothing is not the right way to go about it.

I recently rewatched both seasons in anticipation for the third and the urge to write hit me again. So, here it is. It has been a while and I'm probably rusty, but I hope it lives up to expectations. More will come, I can say that much - as for when, no promises.

The V8 in Hopper's truck rumbled and spluttered back to life, a quick fix for the deafening silence that, only moments ago, had surrounded the duo. His face was crinkled. His eyes spoke a thousand words. Hopper had gone from nearly, almost, perhaps, *ever so slightly* vulnerable - straight back to gruff and angry.

Joyce did feel sorry for him. She honestly, truly did. Or, well, she tried to pretend that she did. Whatever helped, really. Opting - probably for the best - to remain silent, Joyce was jerked in her seat as Hopper shoved the Chevrolet into gear and peeled off. Of course - she'd never say it out loud, but she was almost giddy. This really was exciting.

He spoke carefully and assuredly. He knew what Joyce was like, and he wanted to make it absolutely clear that she couldn't extract anymore information from him.

"It's not right, y'know. Kids that age."

Joyce remained silent. She could tell exactly how he felt, and exactly what he was thinking. He was, of course, hoping it wasn't really true.

He knew Michael. Not awfully well, but not so unwell that he didn't know what he was really like. And this wasn't a stunt typical of Mike to pull. The kid had had some nerve in the past, punching him and all - but it wasn't like that was undeserved on his part either. But really?

He got their 'schtick'. They liked each other. That was - as much as he'd hate to admit - for the most part, alright. Mike made El happy, and Hopper didn't have it in him to complain about having a happy daughter. This, however, well.. this was certainly something. He didn't know who to believe. Was El telling the truth? Did they.. really? They couldn't have. That Wheeler kid wouldn't have had the guts.

He felt her staring. It was obvious. She knew exactly what he was doing. He was running through every possible outcome in his head.

Joyce talks to them, it's a lie. All is safe.

Joyce talks to them, it turns out to be true, and Mike is never seen or heard from again.

A myriad of possibilities. Somewhat unsurprisingly, an increasingly large number of these possibilities involved Mike never being seen or heard from again. It was in his nature, he was a father.

Wrapping her small, almost fragile hand around the large, burly wrist dangling from the centre console, Joyce tried to squeeze out a word or two. She could, for the most part, keep Hopper in check. She knew that very well. It was just finding the right words - that was the hard part.

"You should stay outside, Hop. I'll talk to them. I can handle it."

He glanced at her for a moment before flicking his head back toward the road. It was pitch black out. The winter darkness had enveloped Hawkins. He let out a sigh, nodding slowly. Moving her hand from his wrist, she grabbed her still gently burning Camel from between her lips, offering it over as if it were a peace treaty.

Mike laid on the couch, his mind once again drifting off. Every

Breath You Take had long since finished, and The Dark Side Of The Moon was slowly running its paces on Hopper's record player. As El quietly nuzzled beneath Mike's chin, the duo faced the ceiling, not so much as a peep between them. It wasn't awkward - it was bliss. Ignorant bliss, mind you - as the prospect of interruption was far from off the table. It was guaranteed.

Life just couldn't get any better than this. Even the prospect of starting High School wasn't that daunting. He went over the previous year in his head. Every night, spilling his thoughts about the day into a radio frequency that spoke only in silence. But he was heard. Every night, she knew. She listened. She cared. Every night, tears would well up in his eyes as slammed down the antenna. Sometimes he felt like she was there, even when he knew she wasn't.

He sniffled quietly, welling up a tad, finding himself stuck in the past for a few seconds. The grip of his arms around her stomach tightened. He opened his eyes, looking down at the curly mess of hair atop her head. Mustering up a smirk, he exhaled with ease, back to the present. He slowly poked his head over hers, glancing down at his wristwatch. As it turned out, time had decided to run away rather quickly.

He didn't care. He had El. He felt safe, despite safety being the girl currently snoring under his chin. Resting his head back atop one of the couch's armrests, he closed his eyes, the music in the background the only solace for the silence otherwise draping the cabin.

Just as the Chevy had started, it stopped. With a squeal, the rustling of leaves and a quiet clicking, the engine turned off. Hop didn't need to talk. He wasn't in the mood. He swung open his door and stepped out, swiftly moving around to Joyce's side. Staring as she gently pushed open the door on her side and hopped down, he spoke concisely.

"Let's go."

So off they went, the fateful trek through the freezing woods. It was far from an enjoyable experience, despite the duo both being fairly well suited for the weather at hand. It was dark, it was damp, it was

dreary, and - to top it all off - Joyce was going to be late home. Now, of course, this was an important matter she was attending to, but still. Being away from Will for a second longer than necessary was mounting un-needed tension.

She and Hop plundered towards the cabin, the lighting from within casting a faint haze over the woods surrounding it..